

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

**AIR AND SPACE BASIC COURSE:  
A COST EFFECTIVE CONTRIBUTION TO AIR FORCE OFFICER  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?**

by

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## **Biography**

Lieutenant Colonel Blanchard is a student at the United States Air Force's Air War College. Lt Col Blanchard graduated from the United States Air Force Academy in 1991 with a Bachelor of Science degree and a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant. He completed Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training in 1992 as a rated pilot. His flying career began flying HC-130Ps at Patrick and Moody AFBs where he deployed several times to Prince Sultan Air Base, Saudi Arabia and Keflavik Air Station, Iceland to perform Combat Search and Rescue alert duties. Lt Col Blanchard was selected for fighter crossflow to the A-10 in 1998. He held positions at the Squadron, Group, and Wing level over the course of four A-10 assignments including Operations Support Squadron Commander, Fighter Wing Chief of Safety, squadron Director of Operations twice, and Operations Group Standardization and Evaluation Flight Examiner. Lt Col Blanchard flew combat and combat support missions in support of Operation SOUTHERN WATCH and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in the A-10 and was a member of the CJTF-180 Air Component Coordination Element staff supporting Operation Enduring FREEDOM. Lt Col Blanchard served on the United States Forces Korea Staff in the J-35 directorate as the Special Technical Operations Section Chief. Lt Col Blanchard completed Squadron Officer School in-residence, is a graduate of the Army's Command and General Staff College, and earned a Master of Science degree from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

## Introduction

Since 1998, the USAF endeavored to send every second lieutenant through the Air and Space Basic Course (ASBC) at Maxwell AFB, Alabama within their first two years on active duty.<sup>1,2</sup> The ASBC strives to provide every lieutenant with a baseline knowledge of Air, Space and Cyberspace operations, an understanding of USAF doctrine, heritage, and culture, a commitment to the warrior ethos and USAF core values, and dedication to leading air, space, and cyberspace expeditionary forces.<sup>3</sup> However, the ASBC, as currently configured, only partially accomplishes the objectives for which it was designed and provides minimal contributions to officer professional development. Thus, in the current fiscally constrained environment, the course should be discontinued and the fiscal savings used to increase enrollment at Squadron Officer School (SOS) and lower the overall budget of Air University. Results of a RAND study published as a doctoral dissertation, data from interviews of ASBC graduates' squadron commanders, comments on supervisor surveys of graduates, and logic based arguments bear this assertion out. However, before assessing the merits and shortfalls of the ASBC, essential background information on USAF officer professional development, the genesis of the ASBC, the ASBC curriculum, and the monetary costs of the ASBC is required for context.

USAF officer force development encompasses three main areas: developmental education (DE) including professional military education (PME), career specific technical

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<sup>1</sup> Joel A. Jones, "More 'Athens' Than 'Sparta': The Need For Change In The Air & Space Basic Course" (Master's Thesis, Air University, 2005), 10.

<sup>2</sup> LtCol Mark Ramsey, interview by the author, 12 October 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Squadron Officer College, "Air and Space Basic Course," <http://asbc.maxwell.af.mil/asbc.html> (accessed 3 December 2010).

training, and on-the-job experience.<sup>4</sup> All are critical components of officer professional development, but their relative importance changes over the course of an officer's career. At the inception of an officer's career, technical and occupational training combined with operational experience are key to providing depth of knowledge in a specific discipline. As officers ascend in rank, on-the-job experience and leadership opportunities in various operational, staff, and command positions become more important for force development in order to provide the breadth of knowledge required at senior leadership levels.<sup>5</sup> Finally, PME programs prepare officers for challenges and responsibilities they will face at higher grades and is important throughout an officer's career.<sup>6</sup> Currently, PME includes pre-commissioning education for cadets and officer candidates, ASBC for second lieutenants, SOS for Captains, Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) for Majors, and Air War College (AWC) for Lieutenant Colonels and Colonels. In sum, force development focuses on technical skills and expertise to build depth of knowledge early in an officer's career and transitions to focus on experiences later in an officer's career to build breadth with PME interspersed at key points throughout. In light of the above overview of officer force development, an examination of the genesis of the ASBC is appropriate.

The impetus for ASBC came from an Air Force Long-Range Planning office White Paper on officer development. The paper identified four problems with USAF officers: 1) they do not understand the role of airpower or airpower doctrine, 2) they are not interested in the art of warfare 3) they don't know nor value military history and airpower's role in history 4) they lack

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<sup>4</sup> Chart from briefing, "Officer Professional Development," Air Force Personnel Command, provided by LtCol Dan Luce, 27 October 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Gen Carrol H. Chandler, vice-chief of staff, US Air Force, memorandum for ALMAJCOM/FOA/DRU/CC, 3 December 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

shared values and experiences and do not embrace the warrior ethos but associate with their technical specialty.<sup>7</sup> At the 1996 CORONA conference, the biannual meeting of USAF 4-star generals, the white paper's connotations were addressed. CORONA identified the following problems: officers lacked a common concept of USAF core values, officers did not understand Air Force core competencies and history, officers could not communicate the role of airpower in the joint fight, USAF culture encouraged officers to identify with their career field instead of their service, and officers did not appropriately value teamwork and unit cohesion.<sup>8</sup> As a result, one of the mandates from the 1996 CORONA conference directed that "an Air and Space Basic Course developed for new officers and selected civilian interns ensures a common understanding of air and space power, history, doctrine, operations, joint war fighting, and core values by 2000."<sup>9</sup> Also, CORONA directed that "upon graduation from the Air and Space Basic Course, most officers and selected civilian interns (e.g., intelligence, space) are sent to operational assignments."<sup>10</sup> Following the CORONA findings and direction, General Fogleman, the USAF Chief of Staff in 1996, expanded on the ASBC concept to *Navy Times* stating "that Air Force leaders are seeking to instill in their new officers the same core values, sense of purpose and doctrinal awareness that newly commissioned Marine lieutenants have for their Corps. Too many newly minted Air Force officers are 'stove-piped' in their mentality".<sup>11</sup> Further, Fogleman opined that The Basic School (TBS), the six month course the Marine Corps requires of their

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<sup>7</sup> Jones, "More 'Athens' Than 'Sparta'," 10-11.

<sup>8</sup> Air Force Audit Agency, *New Officer Education*, (Washington, D.C.: US Air Force, 2005), 5.

<sup>9</sup> HQ USAF, *The 1997 Air Force Long-Range Plan: Summary*, planning document, 1997, 15.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Chris Lawson, "They want to be like us!", *The Navy Times*, 16 December 1996, 6.

new lieutenants, represented the model the USAF wanted to emulate.<sup>12</sup> Gen Fogleman stated the ASBC should develop a common bonding experience for new officers, inculcate 'airmindedness' where every officer understands the capability air, space, and cyberspace power brings to the operational environment and be able to articulate those roles to joint force commanders.<sup>13</sup> In addition to addressing the deficiencies outlined at CORONA, Lt Col Legenfelder, the ASBC's first commandant, saw the course as a leveling process to baseline officers from different commissioning sources.<sup>14</sup> Overall, the vision for the ASBC included leveling differences in knowledge and experience from across the commissioning sources, ensuring every USAF officer understood USAF doctrine and the role of air, space, and cyberspace power in joint operations, instilling in officers that they were warrior Airman first and foremost with their specific career field being secondary, and motivating officers to lead teams focused on mission accomplishment and unit cohesion. With those goals in mind, an overview of where the ASBC stands today in terms of attendee demographics and timing of attendance, course length, and curriculum is necessary.

The USAF currently directs that all active duty line officers attend the ASBC within their first two years of commissioned service.<sup>15</sup> The goal since the ASBC's inception, in line with TBS, is to have every newly commissioned second lieutenant attend the ASBC immediately following commissioning prior to any career-field specific technical or flying training and prior to their first assignment.<sup>16,17</sup> However, due to resource constraints, ASBC students represent all

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> House Armed Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, "Statement of Steve Tanous Commandant Squadron Officer College, 15 July 2009, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Bruce D. Callander, "To be and airman (four-week Aerospace Basic Course)", Air Force Magazine, October 1999, 50-53.

<sup>15</sup> LtCol Thomas Painter, interview by the author, 12 October 2010.

<sup>16</sup> Lawson, "They want to be like us," 6.



phases of an officer's first two years of commissioned service from newly commissioned officers to lieutenants who are complete with technical training and have served significant time at their first assignment.<sup>18</sup> Classes are comprised primarily of active duty line officers with a few reserve component and non-line officers in each class.<sup>19</sup> Officially, ASBC is mandatory for all active duty line officers, but currently no consequences exist for officers who cannot attend due to training or operational requirements, and no initiative exists to make ASBC mandatory for non-line or reserve component officers.<sup>20</sup>

Next, a broad overview of the current ASBC curriculum provides background information for the examination of the ASBC's efficacy to officer professional development. The ASBC spans six weeks encompassing five weeks of classroom lectures, combatives training, physical training, problem solving, team building exercises, and simulations, and an operations week which devotes three days to interaction, mentoring, and operations simulations with Senior NCOs from the Senior NCO Academy.<sup>21</sup> During the sixth week, students participate in a mock deployment field exercise focused on basic expeditionary skills, deployed operations threats, and small unit tactical exercises.<sup>22</sup> Some of the expeditionary skills training including self-aid and buddy care and chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive defense training satisfy USAF deployment training requirements while the rest provide orientation and familiarization only.<sup>23</sup> The expeditionary skills training resulted from direction by General Moseley, USAF Chief of Staff in 2008, to incorporate preparation for Air and space Expeditionary Force (AEF)

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<sup>17</sup> Callander, "To be an airman," 50-52.

<sup>18</sup> Ramsey, interview by the author. (Ramsey 2010)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Painter, interview by the author.

<sup>21</sup> Frank Rossi, "ASBC Mission Brief," charts from 2010 ASBC mission brief, 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Rossi, "ASBC Mission Brief."

<sup>23</sup> LtCol Tom Smith, interview by the author, 23 November 2010.

operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>24</sup> The ASBC plans to add M-9 certification to its curriculum in early 2011 and eventually satisfy most pre-deployment training requirements so its graduates arrive at their first duty assignment with most training requirements met.<sup>25</sup>

The monetary cost of the ASBC provides the final key piece of background data for evaluating the ASBC's contribution to officer professional development. For fiscal year 2010, the programmed average cost per student to attend the six week ASBC was \$4,362 and approximately 3,100 students attended ASBC in fiscal year 2010.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, approximately 2,800 students attended the five week SOS course in fiscal year 2010 at an average programmed cost of \$3,705 per student.<sup>27</sup> These numbers do not reflect the overhead required to run the Squadron Officer College (SOC) which administers both courses, but merely the average travel and per diem costs for each student.

### **ASBC Effectiveness**

With background information on the genesis, curriculum, and cost of ASBC as the context, the ASBC's effectiveness can be assessed. Since ASBC's inception in 1998, Dr. Michael Thirtle, a RAND doctoral candidate,<sup>28</sup> and the Air Force Audit Agency<sup>29</sup> studied and published assessments of the course. In addition, in separate interviews, eight Air War College students, all graduated squadron commanders who sent lieutenants to ASBC, gave their

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<sup>24</sup> Patrick Winn, "Learning from War," Air Force Times, 17 March 2008, 8-10.

<sup>25</sup> Smith, interview by the author.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Michael R. Thirtle, *Seeing the Lighthouse - As Simple As The ASBC?*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1999).

<sup>29</sup> Air Force Audit Agency, *New Officer Education*. (Audit Agency 2005)

assessment of the ASBC's impact on their subordinates.<sup>30</sup> Data from supervisor surveys assessing 2009 ASBC graduates provided the final data source.

Beginning with published information, Dr. Thirtle's doctoral dissertation represents the most comprehensive study of ASBC's effectiveness available in the literature. Thirtle provided in-depth historical background information on the impetus for ASBC, details on initial and ongoing development of the ASBC's length and curriculum, and a detailed description of his methods for course assessment.<sup>31</sup> Thirtle, using the stated goals and objectives from the 1996 CORONA conference and quotes from General Fogleman, focused his assessment on two broad categories: cognitive, or knowledge based, and affective, or attitudinal based, learning.<sup>32</sup> Thirtle sought to assess if the ASBC provided knowledge of military history, USAF doctrine, and air and space operations, as well as determine if the ASBC instilled pride in being a warrior Airman and motivation toward a career in the profession of arms. Thirtle's methodology used a test group of ASBC students and a control group of their peers not enrolled in the course. He administered pre and post course tests, surveys, and questionnaires to each group.<sup>33</sup> The tests focused on measuring cognitive effectiveness of the course, and the surveys and questionnaires, scientifically developed based on behavioral science and education theories, provided data for assessing affective learning.<sup>34</sup> Thirtle applied statistical analysis to the results and assessed which were statistically significant.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Interviews by the author of former USAF squadron commanders, 2010.

<sup>31</sup> Thirtle, *Seeing the Lighthouse*, 1-98.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 77-98.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 91-98.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 101-57.

A summary of Dr. Thirtle's results and conclusions provide key data for assessing the ASBC. First, on the cognitive front, Thirtle deemed ASBC very effective overall.<sup>36</sup> Some key findings include: 1) USAF Academy (USAFA) graduates scored highest on the pre-test, followed by Officer Training School (OTS) graduates and then Reserve Officer Training Course (ROTC) graduates, 2) scores on the post test were statistically equal, with ROTC graduates making the largest gains.<sup>37</sup> Two conclusions can be drawn from these results. First, the greatest curriculum overlap between ASBC and the commissioning sources existed with the USAFA. Second, and more importantly, ASBC's curriculum accomplished one of its primary goals, improving and leveling baseline knowledge for lieutenants from different commissioning sources.<sup>38</sup> However, on the affective side, Thirtle found a different story. The ASBC failed to improve the positive outlook of its graduates toward USAF ideals and the USAF.<sup>39</sup> In addition, the decrease in motivation toward the USAF was statistically the same, though trended worse for graduates, between those who attended ASBC and the control group who did not.<sup>40</sup> The affective outcome envisioned for ASBC to instill in officers the warrior ethos and motivate them about the profession of arms failed to materialize. Admittedly, Thirtle's study occurred in 1999 and the SOC implemented many changes to the ASBC curriculum since then, but the Air Force Audit Agency (AFAA) report researched and published in 2005 mirrored some of Thirtle's conclusions.

The AFAA study focused on the necessity and continuing requirement for the ASBC, but was smaller in scope than Thirtle's research. The AFAA compared ASBC curriculum to

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 109-28.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 109-27.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 118-20.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 149-53.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 152-53.

curriculum of the commissioning sources and other PME courses, reviewed and tabulated graduate surveys, and analyzed pre and post test results for ASBC graduates.<sup>41</sup> No control group of lieutenants not attending the course was used, nor were scientifically developed questionnaires assessing affective learning utilized in the AFAA assessment. Similar to Thirtle's results, the AFAA found USAFA graduates performed best on the pre-test followed by OTS, ROTC, and Academy of Military Science (AMS) graduates, respectively.<sup>42</sup> Further, all ASBC graduates post course test scores drastically improved, and the score variation among commissioning sources decreased drastically after the course.<sup>43</sup> Again, the ASBC continued to meet the cognitive learning goal and level knowledge across commissioning sources. Further, the AFAA concluded minimal curriculum redundancy existed between the ASBC and the various commissioning sources or SOS, and commended the SOC curriculum department for vigilant reviews of ASBC and SOS curriculum versus each other and the commissioning sources.<sup>44</sup> On the attitudinal side, the AFAA utilized only graduate's end of course surveys and a vast majority of graduates rated the course satisfactory or better.<sup>45</sup> The AFAA failed to utilize scientific tools to measure affective learning. Further, until 2008, the SOC did not solicit graduate assessments from graduate's supervisors or commanders<sup>46, 47</sup> but the AFAA declined to develop its own survey to garner this information. The AFAA concluded that ASBC was necessary based solely on positive cognitive results and graduate opinions. Considering the time

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<sup>41</sup> Air Force Audit Agency, *New Officer Education*, i-7. (Audit Agency 2005) pi-7

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 1-3.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>46</sup> Marie F. Kraska and Terry R. Bentley, "Perceptions of Graduates and Their Supervisors Related to the Air and Space Basic Course," *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education*, 20 February 2007, <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JITE/v41ni/kraska.html> (accessed 12 October 2010).

<sup>47</sup> Ms. Arden Gale, interview by the author, 8 December 2010.

lapse since Thirtle's research and the failure of the AFAA study to address attitudinal changes amongst ASBC graduates or seek graduate assessments from supervisors, a current study focusing on attitudinal changes and analyzing graduate supervisor surveys would provide needed current data on the ASBC's ability to positively affect graduates' attitudes and motivation.

In order to supplement the minimal data available from ASBC graduate supervisor surveys, the author conducted interviews of eight graduated squadron commanders who sent one or more lieutenants to ASBC. All interviewees were students or faculty at Air War College and witnessed the performance of the officers before and after the ASBC. Interviewees represented a broad range of career fields in the USAF including fighter, bomber and transport operations and operations support, maintenance, personnel, acquisition, space, and medical.<sup>48</sup> Though by no means statistically significant based on sample size, the interview results provide empirical, first-hand information from USAF current and future senior leaders. The author conducted interviews one on one with respondents. The questions asked are provided in Attachment 1. The average numerical responses for question five are shown in graphical form in Attachment 2. A few pieces of data warrant highlighting. First, the average response for all of the sub-areas of question five ranged from 1.44 to 2.33 where a 1 represented no change and a 5 represented outstanding improvement from before the ASBC to after the ASBC. Only one interviewer provided any response of 4 (question 5.f. regarding teamwork and team building)<sup>49</sup> and no response of 5 was given by any interviewee. All other responses to all sub-areas of question five were rated 3 and below.<sup>50</sup> The data purports that the commanders interviewed saw, on average, no to little improvement in their officers as a result of attending ASBC. More telling, when

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<sup>48</sup> Interviews by the author of former USAF squadron commanders, 2010.

<sup>49</sup> LtCol Frederick Weaver, interview by the author, 21 October 2010.

<sup>50</sup> Interviews by the author of former USAF squadron commanders, 2010.

asked question 8, every interviewee responded they would prefer to have a 100% opportunity for Captains to attend SOS and abolish the ASBC, versus maintain the status quo for company grade officer PME where every line officer attends the ASBC and there is an 80% opportunity for Captains to attend SOS.<sup>51</sup> Further, when asked what impact sending new lieutenants to ASBC had on their respective unit's mission (question 6), responses varied from little impact to severe impact depending upon the operations tempo of the respective units. However, one interviewee pursued and received wing commander waivers exempting his lieutenants from attending ASBC due to his unit's extreme operations tempo.<sup>52</sup> Former commanders, when asked for additional thoughts (question 9), provided some insightful responses. At least three interviewees felt lieutenants attended ASBC too close to initial commissioning and if deficiencies existed in lieutenants, the commissioning sources should address them.<sup>53,54,55</sup> Three respondents showed alarm at sending lieutenants to PME after being at their first assignment for only 2-9 months and believed on the job training, experience, and leadership opportunities held greater value for an officer's force development at that stage of their career.<sup>56,57,58</sup> Several interviewees expressed concern that the 80% opportunity for Captains to attend SOS represented a void in company grade officer PME, as an officer could go from ASBC as a lieutenant to retirement without attending another in-residence PME course.<sup>59,60</sup> Finally, four interviewees noted that the sharing of knowledge and experiences that provides great value at in-residence PME was

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<sup>51</sup> Interviews by the author of former USAF squadron commanders, 2010.

<sup>52</sup> LtCol J.R. Twiford, interview by the author, 20 October 2010. (Twiford 2010)

<sup>53</sup> LtCol Theodore Detwiler, interview by the author, 3 November 2010.

<sup>54</sup> LtCol Boswell Gentry, interview by the author, 18 November 2010.

<sup>55</sup> Weaver, interview by the author.

<sup>56</sup> Gentry, interview by the author.

<sup>57</sup> LtCol Mark Suriano, interview by the author, 20 October 2010.

<sup>58</sup> Weaver, interview by the author.

<sup>59</sup> LtCol John Devillier, interview by the author, 19 October 2010.

<sup>60</sup> Weaver, interview by the author.



minimal at ASBC, as the students possessed limited experiences. Those interviewees stated that officers from various career fields they encountered at SOS provided them critical information on how the various career fields in the USAF all provide key components of the team for air, space, and cyberspace operations.<sup>61,62,63,64</sup> Interestingly, corroborating the concern of interviewees and despite The Basic School model and CORONA vision for timing of attendance at the ASBC, two former ASBC squadron commanders interviewed for course background information stated that ASBC classes containing officers with experience operating in their respective career field added great value to classroom discussions and the educational process at the ASBC.<sup>65,66</sup>

Graduate supervisor surveys provide the final, though limited source of data for assessing ASBC's effectiveness. Beginning with 2008 graduates, Air University began soliciting feedback from supervisors of ASBC graduates in addition to graduates themselves, which had been done since course inception.<sup>67</sup> A summary of supervisor survey results exists in Attachment 3. Overall, 93%-97% of supervisors gave favorable ratings. However, when the supervisor comments are reviewed in attachment 3, a different picture emerges. Three supervisors took the time to write favorable comments about the ASBC, nine supervisors were neutral or deemed the course not assessable, and four supervisors demonstrated great negativity toward the course. Certainly a disparity between numerical averages and comments within the survey exists, but more importantly, the neutral and negative comments mirrored the sentiments provided by the

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<sup>61</sup> Devillier, interview by the author.

<sup>62</sup> Gentry, interview by the author.

<sup>63</sup> Suriano, interview by the author.

<sup>64</sup> Weaver, interview by the author.

<sup>65</sup> Painter, interview by the author.

<sup>66</sup> Ramsey, interview by the author.

<sup>67</sup> Air University, *ASBC 09 Alumni and Alumni Supervisors Survey Report*, data compilation, (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University, 2010).



interviewed former squadron commanders. Assessing survey results and psyche of USAF respondents lies outside the realm of this essay, but in general, those who take time to write comments took the survey and its impact more seriously, and those comments should be weighted appropriately versus the numerical ratings given in 'bubble sheets.' Overall the graduate supervisors' opinions lean toward the former squadron commanders' opinions that ASBC provided little gain for their lieutenants and some viewed the course as a waste of time.

### **Fallacies of Concept and Execution of ASBC**

In addition to assessing effectiveness of the ASBC, an evaluation of the ASBC's contribution to officer professional development requires examining existing logical fallacies in its inception and execution.

First, from conception at CORONA, the USAF touted the ASBC as an essential course for every new lieutenant. Yet, policy regarding attendance runs counter to that goal. Officers in the medical and legal career fields seldom attend ASBC, though official policy allows them to attend. In fact, considering those officers pass through the shortest commissioning training, logic dictates the ASBC would be more, not less, important for their development. Likewise, some air reserve component (ARC) officers attend the ASBC, but no policy directs that all new Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve lieutenants attend. On the contrary, the reserve component allocates a limited quota via a board process.<sup>68</sup> Considering the greatly expanded role the total force contributes to the USAF today, the current policy for ARC officers falls well short of the vision for ASBC to baseline and motivate all new USAF officers. Finally, current policy permits wing commanders to grant waivers to exempt line officers from attending the

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<sup>68</sup> "New screening board to identify high-potential officers for developmental education opportunities," *Citizen Airmen: The Official Magazine of the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve*, June 2009, 23.

ASBC, but no consequence exists for officers who don't attend. The policy runs counter to the Marine Corps policy for TBS, which directs that a Marine officer's first assignment after commissioning is TBS.<sup>69</sup>

General Fogleman touted modeling ASBC on TBS to correct perceived cultural and attitudinal deficiencies in the USAF's officer corps because he believed TBS responsible for Marine officers identifying themselves as Marines versus aviators, infantryman, or logisticians.<sup>70</sup> However, enlisted Marines do not attend TBS, yet the Marine culture identifying oneself as a Marine, first and foremost, pervades the USMC and cannot be wholly attributed to TBS. Further, Carl Builder, in *The Icarus Syndrome*, contrasts the identity, or lack thereof, of the USAF with the established culture of the Army and Navy.<sup>71</sup> Yet, neither the Army nor the Navy mandate a course for all incoming officers after initial commissioning. Though a critical part of developing Marine culture, TBS cannot be wholly responsible for Marine Corps culture, and extending that logic, ASBC alone cannot change the culture of the USAF's officer corps as evinced by Thirtle's studies of affective learning. Changing culture requires transformational leadership, a long time horizon, and a pervasive message imbued throughout the organization.<sup>72</sup> A road map for accomplishing that in the USAF lies beyond the scope of this text. If culture change among USAF officers is the goal, the USAF should commission research on how to achieve that objective across the service, versus just assuming PME for new lieutenants will effect that change.

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<sup>69</sup> *Marine Officer - The Basic School*, 2010, [http://officer.marines.com/marine/making\\_marine\\_officers/basic\\_school](http://officer.marines.com/marine/making_marine_officers/basic_school) (accessed 5 December 2010).

<sup>70</sup> Lawson, "They want to be like us," 6-12.

<sup>71</sup> Carl H. Builder, *The Icarus Syndrome* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994.), 3-216.

<sup>72</sup> R. Bolden, J. Gosling, A. Marturano, and P. Denniso, *A Review of Leadership Theory and Competency Frameworks* (Exeter: Centre for Leadership Studies, 2003), 44-7.

The last inconsistency with the concept of ASBC, centers upon why the CORONA attendees mandated establishment of the ASBC versus changing the commissioning sources. Based on Thirtle's and the Air Force Audit Agency's findings noted above, wide variation in knowledge base exists between graduates of the various commissioning sources, and the curriculum taught at the ASBC leveled that knowledge base. It follows that the same curriculum incorporated at the commissioning sources would garner a similar effect. In short, if the 1996 CORONA Conference witnessed a problem in the USAF officer corps, correcting the commissioning sources logically follows. In fact, Jones, researching the ASBC, found fault with the training and educating process among the USAF's commissioning sources.<sup>73</sup>

Finally, when assessing the ASBC's effectiveness, two disparities in its current execution warrant highlighting. First, in light of General Chandler's statement that developmental education prepares officers for increased responsibility they face when promoted to higher grades,<sup>74</sup> teaching joint doctrine and operational planning at the ASBC when the next higher grades include first lieutenant and captain appears premature. The USAF rarely utilizes lieutenants and junior captains as operational planners, doctrine developers, or officers on joint staffs, and the knowledge and training for such belongs as part of the SOS or ACSC curriculum. Second, in 2008, the ASBC drastically revamped its curriculum to focus on expeditionary skills training<sup>75</sup> which is a worthy change considering that Airmen deploy every day to conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, every Airman needs these skills, not just active duty line officers. Basic training, including that encompassed in all commissioning programs, provides the venue to ensure every Airman receives critical expeditionary skills training. Further, some of

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<sup>73</sup> Jones, "More 'Athens' Than 'Sparta'," 12-22.

<sup>74</sup> Chandler, memorandum for ALMAJCOM/FOA/DRU/CC.

<sup>75</sup> Winn, "Learning from War," 8-9.

the expeditionary skills training incorporated in the ASBC is perishable and, to eliminate redundancy, better left as just in time training when the officer receives a deployment tasking.

### **Way Forward**

Based on the facts and opinions related above, three possible courses of action come to the forefront: maintain the status quo in company grade officer PME, expand ASBC to address some of the issues identified by Thirtle, or abolish ASBC and incorporate key aspects of the education elsewhere realizing the monetary savings. A concise examination of each of these options including benefits and detractors follows.

First, arguments abound for maintaining the status quo. Champions of the ASBC point to the knowledge leveling across commission sources identified by Thirtle and the audit agency. Proponents of the course also highlight the course's contributions to expeditionary skills training.<sup>76</sup> However, Thirtle's results on affective learning that concern attitudinal changes as a result of the ASBC indicate the course did little to change motivation or instill a warrior ethos. More telling, the opinions of former squadron commanders and supervisors of the ASBC graduates indicate the ASBC produced little change in their lieutenants at a programmed cost of \$13.5 million dollars (\$4,362 per student X 3,100 students). The investment versus the results in today's fiscally constrained environment makes little sense. Finally, in the current construct of not requiring all new officers to attend ASBC and mandating attendance during the first two years of service instead of immediately upon commissioning, the course is handicapped in its ability to achieve goals envisioned at the 1996 CORONA conference.

Expanding ASBC to a 14 or 23 week course and requiring attendance by every new lieutenant regardless of career-field or service component represents the second option. As

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

Thirtle pointed out, ASBC underwent numerous changes from initial concept at the 1996 CORONA conference, where the vision was akin to a USAF version of TBS, to actual implementation when the initial ASBC proposal for a 16 week course shortened to four.<sup>77</sup> Thirtle's recommendations included changes to ASBC to correct the lack of affective learning and he recommended another look at the TBS model.<sup>78</sup> Thirtle theorized whether the goals from CORONA could be better served by a fundamental change in the USAF to only one commissioning source instead of utilizing ASBC to baseline new officers.<sup>79</sup> Further, Jones explored the idea of USAF commissioning sources abandoning granting degrees and having one commissioning program of approximately six months duration for all officer accessions.<sup>80</sup> Ultimately, Jones concluded that theory too radical, and recommended the ASBC morph into a 12 week course to better address the officer shortcomings identified at CORONA and prepare officers for the current operational reality in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>81</sup> However, the major roadblock to expanding the ASBC mirrors the same constraints that shortened the original vision from 16 weeks to four, resources.<sup>82</sup> Expanding ASBC to a 14 week course entails approximately doubling the programmed TDY budget to \$27 million and adding facilities and personnel to account for the lengthened course. Currently, limited facilities and some leadership and administrative functions are shared between ASBC and SOS under the umbrella of the SOC.<sup>83</sup> Further, even if expanded, no guarantee exists that the ASBC would achieve the desired affective learning to fulfill the initial intent of CORONA and change the culture of the USAF

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<sup>77</sup> Thirtle, *Seeing the Lighthouse*, 48-49.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 162-66.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>80</sup> Jones, "More 'Athens' Than 'Sparta'," 13-27.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 30-39.

<sup>82</sup> Thirtle, *Seeing the Lighthouse*, 48-49.

<sup>83</sup> Smith, interview by the author.

officer corps. Culture exists in the Army and Navy without a basic course and cultural change requires more than educating and training new officers.

The third option entails abolishing ASBC and incorporating key aspects of the curriculum and training at various courses and locations already in existence as well as utilizing the cost savings to bolster attendance at SOS and lower the operating budget of Air University. The ASBC achieved proven results on the cognitive side teaching military history, USAF doctrine, and operational concepts. Incorporate that curriculum, with the same emphasis and grading standards, at the commissioning sources. Based on the pre-test results mentioned above, this will require the fewest changes at the USAFA and largest changes at ROTC and AMS, but would fulfill the goal of developing the same knowledge base among all new lieutenants. Further, incorporate the basic expeditionary skills training into the commissioning sources, but delay the time volatile training until the officers are assigned to an AEF. Many deployment orders specify a timeframe within the pre-deployment window for Airman to complete their training, and every lieutenant performing the training at ASBC when they may not deploy for 6-36 months represents waste and redundancy. Finally, at the institution of the ASBC, the opportunity for captains to attend SOS in-residence decreased from 100% to 80% due to facility, personnel and monetary resource limitations at the SOC.<sup>84</sup> This created a two-fold problem. First, an officer could spend a 20 year career never attending in-residence PME since the ASBC can be waived, SOS only provides an 80% opportunity, and ACSC and AWC are selective programs. That scenario represents a dysfunctional force development scenario. Further, every interviewed former commander of graduates recommended abolishing ASBC and sending every captain to SOS. Also, former ASBC squadron commanders related in their interviews that the most

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<sup>84</sup> Bryant Jordan, "New Course reshapes Squadron Officer School," *Air Force Times*, 23 August 1999, 11.

effective learning took place in the classroom when lieutenants with operational experience, vice immediately graduated from commissioning, attended the course.<sup>85,86</sup> If SOS were increased from 80% back to a 100% attendance opportunity and lengthened back to seven weeks from five (to reverse changes made at the ASBC's inception as a result of resource limitations and curriculum redundancy), a reasonable estimation for the total budget for SOS would be \$15.5 million (extrapolating the TDY costs for two extra weeks). The current SOS programmed budget, approximately \$10.3 million, would be increased by \$5.2 million leaving the remainder of the ASBC budget, \$8.3 million, as savings for the USAF.

## **Conclusion**

The ASBC was conceived as a solution to problems identified with the culture of the USAF's officer corps addressed at the 1996 CORONA conference. Though achieving the goals envisioned at the cognitive level, ASBC falls short on the affective or attitudinal and cultural level and, as witnessed by squadron commanders and some supervisors, graduates show little positive change after the course. These mixed results come at a cost of \$13.5 million and a decrease in opportunity for captains to attend SOS in-residence. The results do not warrant the costs. The ASBC should be disbanded and its curriculum, proven effective on the cognitive level, incorporated into the commissioning sources to ensure the same knowledge of USAF history, core values, doctrine, and air and space operations among all new lieutenants. Further, due to the quantum leaps in learning that in-residence PME represents over correspondence, the resource savings from abolishing ASBC must be applied to ensure every captain attends an expanded SOS in-residence that is lengthened back to seven weeks and incorporates the air and space operations and wargaming curriculum from the ASBC. This new PME construct would

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<sup>85</sup> Ramsey, interview by the author.

<sup>86</sup> Painter, interview by the author.

provide overall cost savings for the Air Force of \$8.3 million. Finally, the USAF should sponsor current research, similar to Thirtle's work, to assess affective learning of current and former ASBC students in light of the numerous curriculum changes over the years and the large pool of graduates who span a decade of USAF officers. A study focusing on attitudinal changes of recent and former graduates could assess whether the ASBC changed USAF culture positively, and if not, would warrant further research into the steps necessary to change USAF culture.





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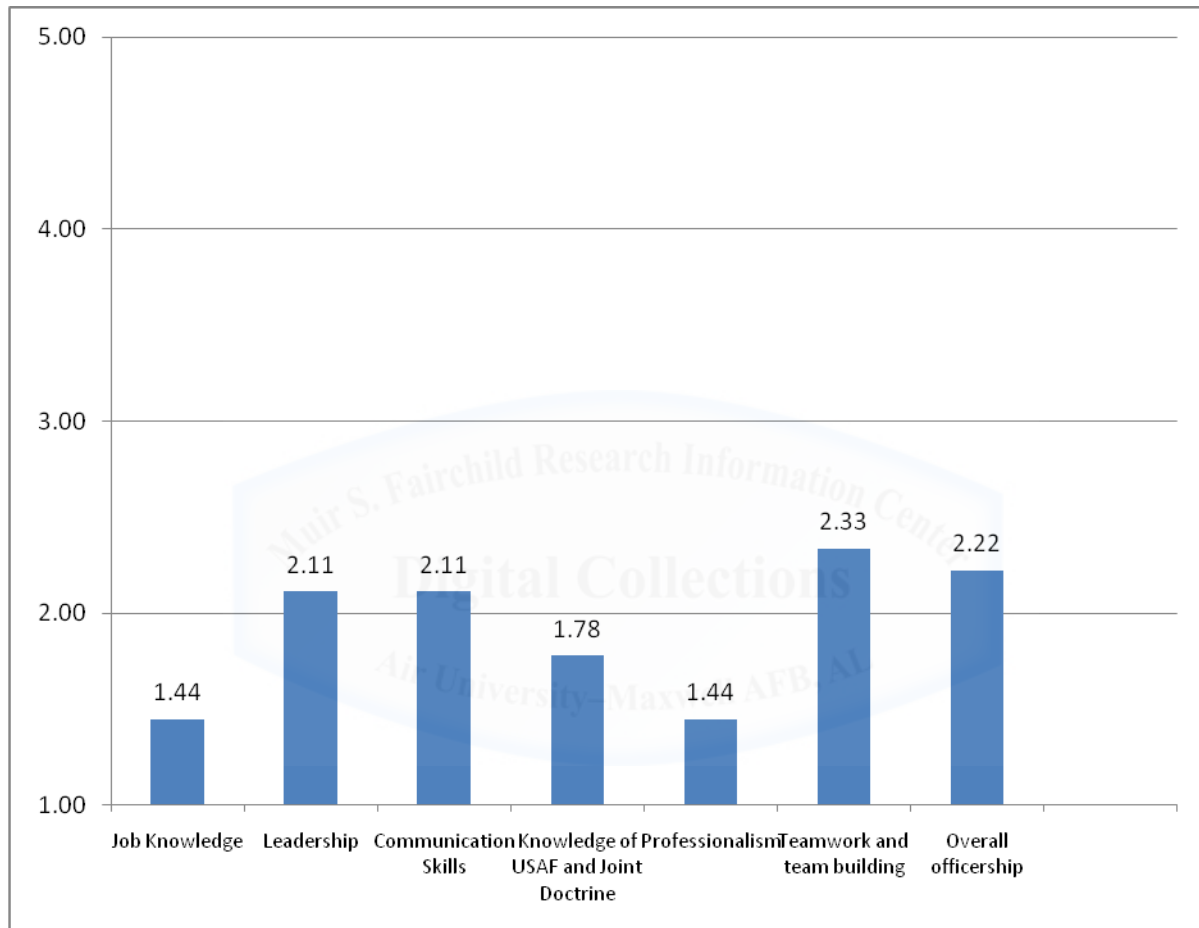
## **ATTACHMENT 1**

### **Interview Questions for former SQ/CCs:**

- 1) Rank at time of command?
- 2) Type and size of squadron(s)?
- 3) Did you send any Lts to ASBC during your command?
- 4) How many?
- 5) Using a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no change and 5 is outstanding improvement from before ASBC to after ASBC, rate your Lts on:
  - a) Job knowledge?
  - b) Leadership?
  - c) Communication skills?
  - d) Knowledge of USAF and Joint doctrine?
  - e) Professionalism?
  - f) Teamwork and team building?
  - g) Overall officership?
- 6) Using a scale of 1-5, where 1 is no impact and 5 is severe impact assess the impact to your unit's mission of sending a Lt to ASBC?
- 7) If you had to choose between increasing the opportunity for Capts to attend in-residence SOS to 100% and abolishing ASBC, or keeping ASBC and continuing with an 80% opportunity for Capts to attend SOS, which do you believe is more favorable for development and education of company grade officers?
- 8) Do you have any comments you want to add?

## ATTACHMENT 2

Averages of Interviewee's Responses: <sup>87,88,89,90,91,92,93</sup>



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<sup>87</sup> Detwiler, interview by the author.

<sup>88</sup> Devillier, interview by the author.

<sup>89</sup> Gentry, interview by the author.

<sup>90</sup> LtCol Andre Kennedy, interview by the author, 5 November 2010.

<sup>91</sup> Suriano, interview by the author.

<sup>92</sup> Weaver, interview by the author.

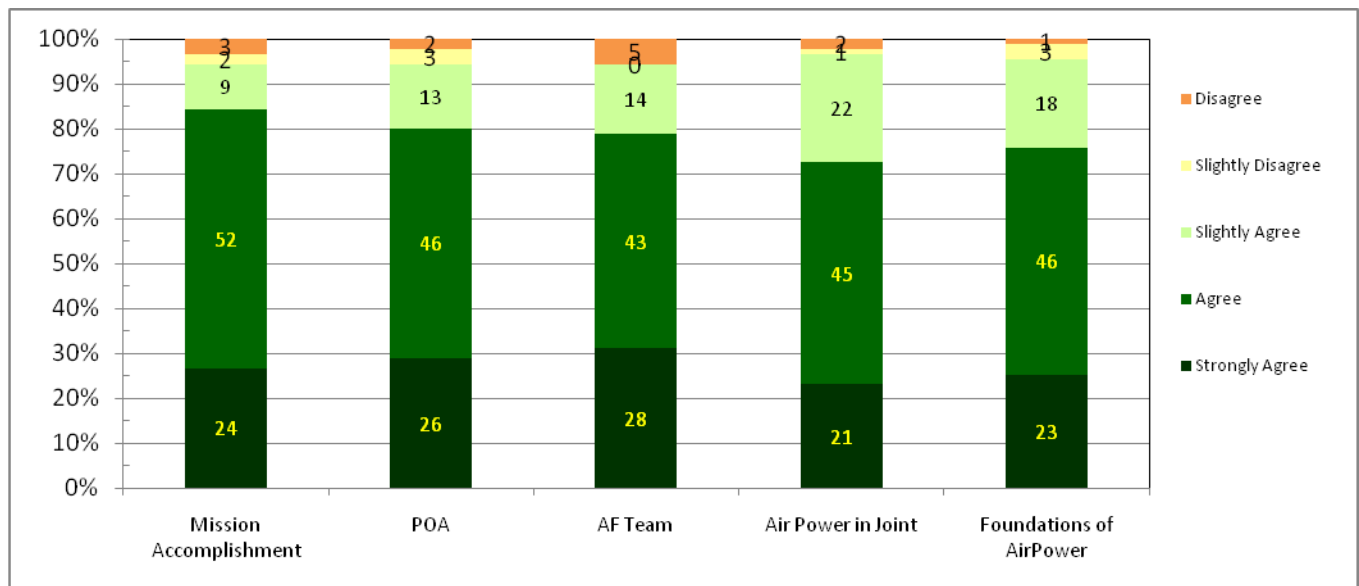
<sup>93</sup> LtCol Marty Reynolds, interview by the author, 18 December 2010.

### ATTACHMENT 3<sup>94</sup>

#### ASBC 09 Resident Alumni Supervisor Mission Accomplishment and Student Outcomes

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Agree	Total Disagree	Total
<b>My subordinate, who graduated from Air and Space Basic Course (ASBC) in 2009, demonstrates that ASBC accomplished its mission.</b>									
Frequency	24	52	9	2	3	1	85	6	91
Percentage	26%	57%	10%	2%	3%	1%	93%	7%	100%
<b>embracing the profession of arms by applying the Air Force core values with the heart, mind, and body of an air, space, and cyberspace warrior.</b>									
Frequency	26	46	13	3	2	1	85	6	91
Percentage	29%	51%	14%	3%	2%	1%	93%	7%	100%
<b>valuing the expeditionary air, space, and cyberspace force as a team, and the role of Air Force officers in leading within this team.</b>									
Frequency	28	43	14	0	5	1	85	6	91
Percentage	31%	47%	15%	0%	5%	1%	93%	7%	100%
<b>comprehending air, space, and information operations as the primary means for effectively employing air, space, and cyberspace power as a part of the joint war-fighting team.</b>									
Frequency	21	45	22	1	2	0	88	3	91
Percentage	23%	49%	24%	1%	2%	0%	97%	3%	100%
<b>comprehending Air Force history, doctrine, and distinctive capabilities as the foundation for the effective employment of air, space, and cyberspace power.</b>									
Frequency	23	46	18	3	1	0	87	4	91
Percentage	25%	51%	20%	3%	1%	0%	96%	4%	100%

<sup>94</sup> Air University, *ASBC 09 Alumni and Alumni Supervisors Survey Report*.



#### ASBC 09 Resident Alumni Supervisor Comments

Please provide any comments you have about the performance of the ASBC graduate(s) of 09 that you supervise. ASBC 09 Resident Alumni Supervisors provided 16 comments generally indicating a satisfaction level with the subordinates they supervise but uncertainty as to how much of their qualities can be attributed to ASBC attendance.

1	ASBC was a waste of time for my officer. Being prior-service, the only part of the curriculum that would have been helpful was the role of an officer in the Air Force and this area wasn't addressed sufficient. He still didn't have a good sense on what was different between an officers and enlisted in the military.
2	Great LT so far; I really can't complain.
3	Having arrived here recently I have 2 good success stories and 2 ok which is why I have put the 'Slightly Agree' down
4	I have had two graduates and ASBC has provided a outstanding foundation.
5	I have more than one APT LT that works for me. It'd be nice to have identified the specific individual this survey is referring to. Thank you.
6	I would like to see officers that act more like officers. In general I have noticed a steady decline in the maturity, motivation and the ability of young officers to meet basic standards and expectations. If ASBC is going to continue, how about insisting on some discipline, teaching some basic professionalism and insisting on physical fitness. I really do not care about the other stuff you are teaching them because without these basics the other stuff does not matter.
7	It is difficult to answer and properly gauge these questions. I do not have a frame of reference on how they were before ASBC. Most of these questions refer to information ROTC, USAFA, and OTS teaches. ASBC builds and re-enforces these information but it is hard to decipher the effect ASBC had on the new officers. ASBC is great because it gets all the young Lts on the same page and reiterates AF concepts but it is hard to quantify the effect on the Lts
8	It would help if you identified who the officer is that I am providing feedback on. I took Command as OG/CC in Jun 10 and this is in regard to personnel that attended ASBC in 2009...
9	My graduate was prior enlisted...so not sure how much ASBC instilled in him versus his enlisted career/PME.

10	My subordinate demonstrates competence in understanding the Air Force Mission, Core Values, and embodies the heart and mind of Air, Space, and Cyberspace Power. He understands Air Force history, doctrine, and distinctive capabilities.
11	My subordinate, who graduated from ASBC in 2009 is an exceptional officer and lives the USAF core values daily. I do not believe that ASBC enhanced that. The course has nearly no value as far as I have seen since its inception.
12	Not sure how supervisors can gauge this, since these aren't exactly topics of conversation outside of a PME environment.
13	Not sure who you are referring to I oversee 1,800 students annually.
14	Stellar performer with lots of motivation.
15	These objectives were accomplished in ROTC or AFA. It spend too much time out of primary duties and primary duty training.
16	These questions are very slanted towards ABSC course. My subordinate, who attended this course, is an exceptional officer who is not the caliber of officer he is as a result of this course (which your survey tends to suggest would be the case if he/she is performing). This course may or may not have enhanced his performance/knowledge--but the survey is an all or nothing.

